



American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
AFT PSRP
AFT Higher Education
AFT Public Employees
AFT Nurses and Health
Professionals

555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202-879-4400
www.aft.org

Randi Weingarten
PRESIDENT

Fedrick C. Ingram
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Evelyn DeJesus
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

VICE PRESIDENTS

J. Philippe Abraham
Shelvy Y. Abrams
Frederick Albert
Elba L. Aponte Santos
Barbara Bowen
Vicky Rae Byrd
Zeph Capó
Donald Carlisto
Larry J. Carter, Jr.
Kathy A. Chavez
Donna M. Chiera
Melissa Cropper
Amanda Curtis
Jolene T. DiBrango
GlenEva Dunham
Marietta A. English
Francis J. Flynn
Jeffery M. Freitas
Lisa J. Gourley
David Gray
Ron Gross
Anthony M. Harmon
David Hecker
Karla Hernandez-Mats
Jan Hochadel
Jerry T. Jordan
Frederick E. Kowal
Stephanie Ly
Terrence Martin, Sr.
John McDonald
Daniel J. Montgomery
Michael Mulgrew
Andrew Pallotta
Donna Phillips, RN
Juan Ramirez
Jesse Sharkey
Andrew Spar
Denise Specht
Wayne Spence
Jessica J. Tang
Adam Urbanski
Debbie White, RN
Carl Williams



April 20, 2021

Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Neal:

On behalf of the 1.7 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, I applaud you for holding today's hearing on issues that impact the day-to-day lives and economic security of working families, particularly women. Access to paid leave and child care was at a crisis point before the pandemic; the extra strain of COVID-19 has revealed just how broken our support systems are, and it highlights why it is imperative that we build back these systems better.

The United States is one of the only countries in the world that does not guarantee paid family leave. We also rank toward the bottom for providing child care support to families and access to affordable, high-quality early education and care. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, among 41 countries, the United States is the only one that does not mandate any paid leave for new parents; this can turn the birth or adoption of a child into an economic hardship. Without paid family leave, most Americans are unable to take time off from work to care for a newborn or a seriously ill family member. In fact, an estimated 1 in 5 retirees have left, or been forced to leave, work earlier than planned to care for a family member. Without paid family leave, many women simply leave the workforce—often with devastating impacts on their long-term economic well-being. No family should face poverty because of a birth, an illness or elder care needs.

To make matter worse, most families are also priced out of child care and do not learn of the high rates or long wait lists until they are already expecting a child. In approximately 28 states, the cost of child care for an infant exceeds the cost of in-state college tuition. In addition to limits imposed by cost, many areas of the country, especially in rural communities, lack child care and pre-K programs altogether. And dire child care workforce conditions are intensified, if not caused, by a chronic lack of public investment in the care economy, compounding the child care crisis. Despite the high cost of child care and pre-K, the majority of early childhood educators earn poverty-level wages; even those with credentials similar to their peers in public K-12 schools often earn less. Due to low wages, educator turnover in child care and pre-K programs is 30 percent nationally, which contributes to the scarcity of available programs. The absence of sustained and coordinated federal investment in early education and care has meant, too often, that families cannot afford to pay for child

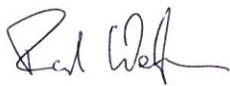
The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

care or pre-K and early educators cannot afford to continue to work in early childhood education. Major public investment is absolutely critical to shoring up availability, enhancing quality and controlling costs. A transformative federal investment and overhaul of our care systems would change of the lives of American families.

We appreciate that Congress acknowledged the need for paid leave in earlier COVID-19 relief bills and that the American Rescue Plan made the largest investment in child care in our nation's history. But these were emergency measures to get families through the toughest parts of the pandemic. The paid leave policy in the recent legislation gave families a temporary sigh of relief if a family member contracted COVID-19. The emergency investment in child care prevented child care programs from closing their doors and helped them remain open safely. Yet, the 140,000 job losses in December 2020 were all women, and they disproportionately affected women of color. Since the pandemic began, it is estimated that more than 2.3 million women have left the workforce due to a range of issues—from being laid off, to having to care for a child due to a lack of child care, to having to help a child with virtual learning.

As our nation continues to recover from the pandemic and begins to reopen, we cannot leave working women or their families behind. Now is the time to finally join other industrialized nations in making national paid leave and child care a reality. We look forward to continuing to work with you and the committee on these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Randi Weingarten", with a stylized, cursive script.

Randi Weingarten
President, American Federation of Teachers